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Remarks by Ambassador Gene A. Cretz
at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace
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U.S.–Libyan Relations: The Second Year of Normalization

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for this opportunity. It is an honor for me to be here today speaking at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in the presence of so many impressive scholars, academics, and journalists.

The United States and Libya have just embarked on the second year of fully renewed diplomatic relations – including the first exchange of Ambassadors in 36 years. In previous speeches, I have made – and will continue to make – the case that continued engagement with Libya is in our long-term national interest. While I recognize that this will not be an easy task, I am fully committed to seeing that we, at the U.S. Embassy in Tripoli, exert as much effort as required to ensure that the relationship stays on a positive path.

No doubt, there remain differences that have at times threatened to derail our political relationship. Last August, the hero's welcome of convicted Lockerbie bomber Abdel Basset al-Megrahi in Libya was an event that directly impacted bilateral relations. Since that time, we have experienced other difficult moments but have been able to work together with the Libyans to pull through them and keep the relationship on stable footing.

Over the last year, we've made considerable progress in establishing the basic framework of our new bilateral relationship. The challenge now is to continue fleshing out this framework and to institutionalize it, through new initiatives and high-level talks that will advance our shared objectives and ensure that we can keep regular channels of communication open at all times. We have core equities at stake in Libya, in the areas of nonproliferation, counterterrorism, military, economic, political, and public diplomacy cooperation, and we consider Libya a strategic ally in the region.

Libya continues to serve as a model for global nuclear nonproliferation efforts. In working with the Libyans to fulfill their commitments to dismantle weapons of mass destruction programs, we are jointly advancing the principles of a nuclear and weapons of mass destruction-free world advocated by the President during his Nuclear Security Summit and the recent Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Conference in New York. The Libyan leader has shared these calls for a nuclear free world in his recent speeches.

As part of our nonproliferation efforts, we are working with Libyan scientists not only to complete the dismantling of Libya's weapons of mass destruction programs, but also to convert former weapons of



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mass destruction facilities into peaceful uses, such as pharmaceutical factories, water desalination plants, and nuclear medical centers.

This work is at the core of the Embassy's efforts to fulfill President Obama's call for increased engagement in science and technology in the Muslim world. In April, we were privileged to host Presidential Science Envoy Dr. Elias Zerhouni, the former Director of the National Institutes of Health. Dr. Zerhouni's visit was focused on building bridges with the scientific, medical, and academic communities to help identify opportunities for sustained cooperation with American institutions. Dr. Zerhouni's successful trip and the honest discussions that took place represent a significant step forward in our bilateral relationship.

The U.S.-Libya relationship has rapidly expanded to include much more than cooperation in nonproliferation and science and technology.

Today, Libya remains a strong ally in countering terrorism in a volatile region. It has fought the expansion of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, has condemned kidnappings, and has taken a position against the paying of ransom to kidnappers.

Libya also has taken the lead in developing new approaches to counterterrorism, undertaking serious rehabilitation efforts with Libyan Islamic Fighting Group members and other former extremists. This initiative has arguably influenced the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group's decision to break ties with the Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb network. Libya's efforts in this regard, led by Saif al-Islam al-Qadhafi, are under careful review by international counterterrorism experts and are worthy of further attention. They may serve as a model to apply to other extremist groups across the globe.

Our counterterrorism cooperation with Libya provides new venues for public security training and reform, initiatives that could, over time, help address many of our longstanding human rights concerns. Libya has participated in Anti-Terrorism Assistance Programs and has expressed interest in receiving assistance to upgrade its detention and prison facilities, to include the training of prison guards, public security officials and judges in many specific areas, including respect for the human rights of detainees.

We have also made great strides in the last year on military cooperation, first, by signing a Memorandum of Understanding with Libya on future defense cooperation, and then by finalizing an end-user agreement that sets the stage for a new security assistance relationship. We plan to launch a bilateral Political-Military dialogue that will form the basis for our security engagement in the years to come.

Over the next year, we plan to initiate International Military Education and Training programs for Libya, including English language training for military officials. We also plan to increase the number of bilateral exchanges and visits, introducing Libyans to U.S. standards of military conduct, and increasing the prospects for long-term interoperability, which is a key aspect of our regional peacekeeping goals. These programs will further professionalize a military that is respectful of civilian control over the armed



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forces, and mindful of human rights. We also stand ready to help Libya upgrade its nonlethal military capabilities, an essential component to any future African Union peacekeeping capacity.

On the commercial front, Libya is a country that is just opening up to international investment, technological advancement, and infrastructure development. Libya has also recently begun privatization efforts that will provide additional opportunities for U.S. companies to do business in Libya.

Since 2001, Libya has launched a number of economic reform initiatives as part of a campaign to adopt a market-oriented approach to economic development, to build its human capacity, and to diversify the economy in non-oil and gas sectors. It is important to note what a massive undertaking this has been – Libya effectively has been attempting to make up for forty years of systemic stagnation and to re-constitute its bureaucratic and economic capabilities. We have an opportunity to support Libyan economic reform efforts while promoting U.S. business interests. We are working with the Libyan Government on new anti-money laundering and counterterrorist finance programs which will further both our economic and our security interests.

We also are working to support President Obama's New Export Initiative by energetically promoting U.S. business interests in Libya. Libya is an emerging market with plans to invest hundreds of billions of dollars in housing and infrastructure, health, education, and commercial projects over the next five years. Libyans want American products including foodstuffs, cars and motorcycles, manufacturing equipment, household appliances, and medical supplies. We have prioritized our advocacy of U.S. companies interested in doing business in Libya and have partnered with those American businesses already on the ground to ensure a level playing field for U.S. exporters in the Libyan market.

We have seen significant progress in our bilateral commercial relationship over the last few months. In February, the Embassy hosted the first U.S. Trade Mission to Libya in nearly 40 years, an impressive gathering of 25 top U.S. companies that was led by senior Commerce Department officials. The delegation met senior Libyan officials in all sectors of the economy and participated in more than 150 meetings with Libyan businesses. The enthusiasm shown by Libyan government and business representatives for the Trade Mission, and their calls for more trade missions, demonstrate Libya's keen interest in expanded commercial ties.

We took another significant step forward just last week, when the Office of the United States Trade Representative and the Libyan General People's Committee on Industry, Economy and Trade signed a Trade and Investment Framework Agreement, or TIFA. The TIFA provides a forum to address a wide range of trade and investment issues including market access, intellectual property, labor, and environmental issues. The TIFA will also help to increase commercial and investment opportunities by identifying and working to remove any remaining impediments to trade and investment flows between the United States and Libya.



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On the political front, we are continuing an open and frank human rights dialogue with the Libyans. We hope to use the mechanism of a bilateral human rights dialogue to lay the foundation for a vigorous discussion of the issues that concern both of us, including the role of civil society, respect for freedom of speech and press, and refugee and migration issues.

As Libya takes on important roles over the next year on the international stage, including serving as the President of the Arab League and hosting the Arab-African Summit at the end of this year, the United States will support Libya's efforts to encourage other countries to follow its model of combating terrorism, promoting nuclear nonproliferation, and encouraging Libyan efforts to promote peace, stability, and security in the region.

Likewise, the United States will continue to encourage Libya in its current capacity as president of the UN General Assembly and as a member of the UN Human Rights Council to administer the responsibilities entrusted to it in a way that encourages nations to uphold the rule of law, to abide by international regulations, and to respect universal human rights.

In order to continue to advance our overall agenda in this second year of normalization, we must work on the fundamentals of the relationship – that is, the people-to-people ties that have endured in the face of three decades of political estrangement.

The United States has a robust plan to encourage greater people-to-people ties. Over the last year, we carried out a series of large public events designed to showcase American culture, promote a positive image of the United States, and cultivate the common interests that exist between the American and Libyan people. These events ranged from a Thanksgiving dinner for nearly six hundred Libyans who had studied in the U.S. in the 1960s and 1970s, to an Iftar for academic and religious leaders, and a Broadway musical performance that literally left audiences clamoring for more. We even took the show on the road to eastern Libya, launching the first large-scale U.S. cultural programming in that region in more than 50 years.

In the education sphere, we have reinstated the full range of exchange programs, including the Fulbright program, and we anticipate sending more than 150 Libyans to the United States on training and exchange programs in just the next year alone. We are working to improve the quality of English language instruction and American studies curricula at universities, secondary schools and institutes across the country. For the first time in decades, Libyan students hear American accents in the halls of their universities.

We are also working with the Libyan Government to increase the number of Libyans studying in the United States from the current 1,700 students to 6,000. This is a remarkable change from the sanctions era, which ended less than ten years ago.

To encourage an even greater number of Libyans to study in the United States, the U.S. Embassy is organizing the first-ever Study in the USA Education Fair in Tripoli. At this event, planned for November, we look forward to welcoming more than sixty American colleges, universities, English language schools,



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and boarding schools. The Embassy is working with the Libyan Ministry of Education, Al-Fateh University, and the Libyan Ministry of Foreign Affairs to organize a comprehensive event that will showcase the best in U.S. education. The 2010 Study in the USA Education Fair will mark the first organized visit by any American college or university to Libya in more than three decades.

To facilitate these people-to-people exchanges, we reestablished consular services in Tripoli in the spring of 2009. In the past year, we have issued over 5,500 visas to Libyan students, businesspeople, officials, and tourists, and are now interviewing almost 50 Libyan visa applicants per day. This work allows Libyans to visit the United States, building critical people-to-people bonds, and at the same time facilitates bilateral business, cultural, and political development.

In March, Assistant Secretary of State for Consular Affairs Janice Jacobs visited Tripoli and launched the first round of visa reciprocity talks with her Libyan counterparts. Although the issue of visa reciprocity is a complicated one, we have already witnessed a significant step forward. On May 19, the Libyan government announced that American tourists and businesspeople will now be treated in the same manner as their European counterparts, which will greatly facilitate both tourist and business travel. We expect to see an increasing number of American tourists visiting Libya's amazing cultural heritage and truly unique desert landscapes this summer.

Libya's decision to relinquish its weapons of mass destruction and end its support for terrorism presented a rare, historic opportunity to help a formerly rogue nation change course. Our national security interests mandate that we must stay engaged.

Dialogue, cooperation, and understanding each other's needs are what will enable us to overcome the significant challenges that lie ahead. After more than three decades of suspicion and mistrust, it will take time and sustained effort for both sides to rebuild an atmosphere of mutual understanding.

It is only through the establishment of lasting institutions and relationships between Americans and Libyans on all levels, that our bilateral relationship will be able to survive the vicissitudes of the political arena that could set it back.

As we work on developing the institutions and framework of our new bilateral relationship, it is important to focus not on the suffering and tragedy of these last years, but on the many opportunities that lie ahead.

Fortunately, in Libya today there is a reservoir of goodwill toward Americans, toward our culture and our values, toward our educational institutions and toward our commercial products. It is a population that, in sum, wants close ties to our nation. I hope that we can continue to capitalize on this goodwill, and build the relationships and institutions that are at the heart of any successful diplomatic relationship.



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The last year and a half have been quite remarkable, and there is no doubt that we have made considerable progress in establishing the basic framework of our new bilateral relationship. I should note that my remarks today take place against the backdrop of the tragic crash of an Afriqiyah Airlines plane on May 12 in Tripoli. This terrible accident, which resulted in significant loss of life, also served as a reminder of how much our relationship with Libya has evolved in recent years. For the first time in decades, our two countries cooperated in an international civil aviation investigation, with officials from the U.S. National Transportation Safety Board working side-by-side with Libyan, French, and other counterparts to determine the cause of this terrible accident. Given the difficult history between the U.S. and Libya, I personally have found this bilateral cooperation to be a poignant yet encouraging symbol of the new relationship and the many positive developments still to come.

Thank you for your attention; I'll be happy to take your questions.